

RESTORATION UPDATE



A newsletter on the Salton Sea Restoration Project

October 2003

SSA Board Urges State Not to “Reinvent the Wheel”

The Salton Sea Authority Board recently applauded the state’s linkage of the Salton Sea restoration to the resolution of Colorado River water transfer issues, while expressing serious concern that new state legislation may result in a loss of local influence, repetitive studies and slow the restoration process. The Board voted September 25 to work with state officials to iron out new roles and responsibilities in light of the legislation that will provide up to \$300 million for Salton Sea restoration but put the state in charge of the effort.

“Why should we waste millions of dollars to start the ballgame all over again?” said Board Member Roy Wilson, a member of the Riverside County Board of Supervisors. “We need to work with the state and show them we are already working towards a preferred alternative. There is no room for back sliding.”

Wilson made the motion ultimately approved by the board that authorizes negotiations with the state to keep the Authority in a lead position.

The Authority is seeking to ensure there is substantial local decision-making and involvement and to “greatly accelerate” the state’s December 2006 timetable for submitting a preferred project.

The three bills, signed by Governor Davis in late September, establish a new restoration planning process led by the State of California. The legislation also sets up an advisory committee that may or may not be linked to existing Salton Sea Authority, Bureau of Reclamation and Salton Sea Science Office efforts. The legislation also sets a December 2006 date for the State Resources Agency to prepare a restoration study.

“This is really a victory in many ways,” said Authority Board President Andy Horne, a member of the Imperial Irrigation District Board of Directors, in praising the state’s financial linkage of the Salton Sea’s restoration to the water transfer. “We need to work with the state and come up with an appropriate division of duties,” he said.

The Authority is also urging state officials to maximize use of existing restoration resources within the Salton Sea Science Office, Bureau of Reclamation, University of Redlands and the Authority.

“We have taken the position of being in the driver’s seat on Salton Sea restoration,” said Authority Vice President Gary Wyatt, a member of the Imperial County Board of Supervisors. “We need to stay in front of this and help drive it to completion,” he said. Wyatt noted that there is 40 years of information that has already been developed. “We do not need to reinvent the wheel.”

In addition to concerns about loss of local influence and the three-year length of the process for determining a preferred alternative, the Authority board members expressed fear the funds could be diverted to other Colorado River projects.

“We need to make it very clear we intend to maintain as much local control as possible and see to it that money intended for the Salton Sea is spent at the Salton Sea,” Horne said.



Salton Sea Authority Board Members Peter Nelson, Andy Horne and Gary Wyatt respond to public comments at the September Board meeting.

Water Transfer Agreement Includes Restoration Funding

The Quantification Settlement Agreement, which has authorized the largest ever ag-to-urban water transfer and secured funds for Salton Sea restoration, is now in place. All four water agencies have signed the deal and state legislation, approved in September, will facilitate implementation. Most importantly to the Salton Sea Restoration effort, the state legislation provides approximately \$300 million in restoration funding and firmly links restoration of the Sea to water transfers.

While there are many aspects to the final settlement, from the perspective of the Salton Sea Restoration effort, inflows are more or less protected for 15 years and a restoration fund has been established. Much of the potential funding will come from the sale of the mitigation water flowing into the Sea during the first 15 years. Another 800,000 acre feet could be sold by the IID to the state for \$175 per acre foot and resold to urban water agencies for \$250 per acre foot during the 15 year period if that water is not needed under a preferred restoration plan. Profits would be used to mitigate environmental impacts and for restoration.

Additionally, the Imperial Irrigation District, Coachella Valley Water Authority and the San Diego County Water Authority will be paying \$30 million in fees into the restoration fund. The Metropolitan Water District will add a \$20 per acre-foot fee for any surplus water they receive from the Colorado River. The state has committed to pay for mitigation costs beyond those committed to by the agencies.

While there is much work to do to finalize a restoration plan with the State (see related front page story), the water transfer deal, while it will have significant impacts on the Sea, provides a great deal of certainty about funding and State commitment to restoration.



Inflows from the Alamo and New River (above) to the Salton Sea will likely be reduced as a result of the QSA due to the ag-to-urban water transfer.

MEETINGS SCHEDULE

Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

November 13

10:30am

Salton City

Board of Directors Meeting

October 23

10:00am

Imperial Irrigation District-La Quinta

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

ACWA Breakfast Series

Westlake Village, Ventura

October 16

Imperial Valley League of Cities

October 23



Plaza La Quinta

78-401 Highway 111, Suite T

La Quinta, CA 92253

www.saltonsea.ca.gov

Dust Storm at the Salton Sea



On September 4th, a dust storm moved northwest across the Salton Sea, the remnants of which were seen as far away as downtown Palm Springs. Dust management is an integral part of all Salton Sea restoration plans.



The Salton Sea is a vital habitat for many species of birds along the Pacific Flyway.

Restoration Effort Moves Forward

Engineers are well into the first stage analysis of the Salton Sea's lakebed that will help determine the feasibility of key restoration plans. URS Corporation and Tetra Tech, environmental and engineering firms contracted by the Salton Sea Authority, began a six-week drilling program on Monday, September 22 after a brief media conference at Johnson's Landing in Salton City.

"We're looking for information – hard data on the lakebed's properties – that will help us determine if and how the sea can be turned into a manageable lake," said Mike Walker of the Bureau of Reclamation.

"The crew has so far turned up some valuable data that will be analyzed by our technical team."

URS has already drilled borings into the Sea's floor at five separate locations. A total of 21 sites are scheduled for drilling.

How the resulting data affects proposed restoration efforts is unknown at this time.

"Until we drill at all the

locations and gather as much data as possible on the Sea's lakebed, we won't know exactly what course of action is the most feasible," says Imperial County Supervisor and Salton Sea

Authority Vice President, Gary Wyatt. "We do know inflows to the sea are going to be reduced and we need to determine the best plan of action to ensure the sea's vibrant future."

The Quantification Settlement Agreement, recently approved by California's four largest water agencies, will divert a significant portion of the Sea's inflows from Imperial County to San Diego. Among the several related restoration projects the Salton Sea Authority is considering to accommodate the reduced inflow is a plan that will convert the Sea into a smaller, environmentally balanced body of water by constructing an earthen

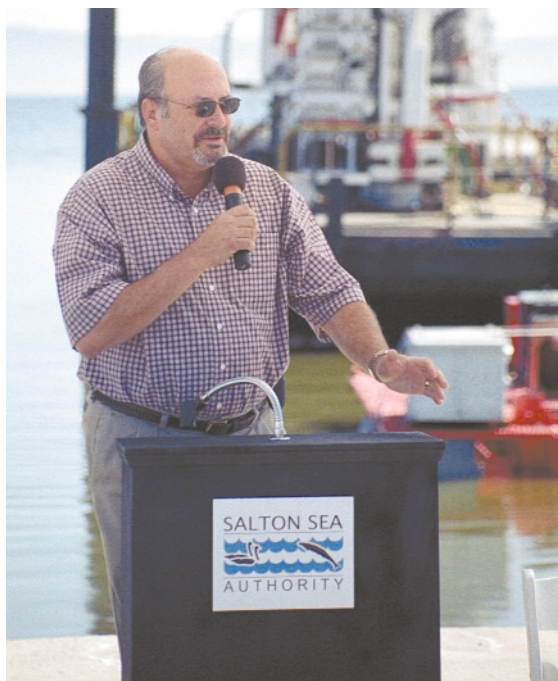
dike across the Sea. The plan would provide refuge for millions of birds and fish, provide jobs for nearby residents and create a recreational haven for visitors to the Salton Sea.

Prior to this study, very little information existed on the Sea's sub-bottom conditions. Some have speculated there are layers of soft sediment leading to more solid materials. Much of the known sediment at the Sea's bottom came from the Grand Canyon as the Colorado River carved its way through to the Salton Sink (where the Salton Sea currently sits).

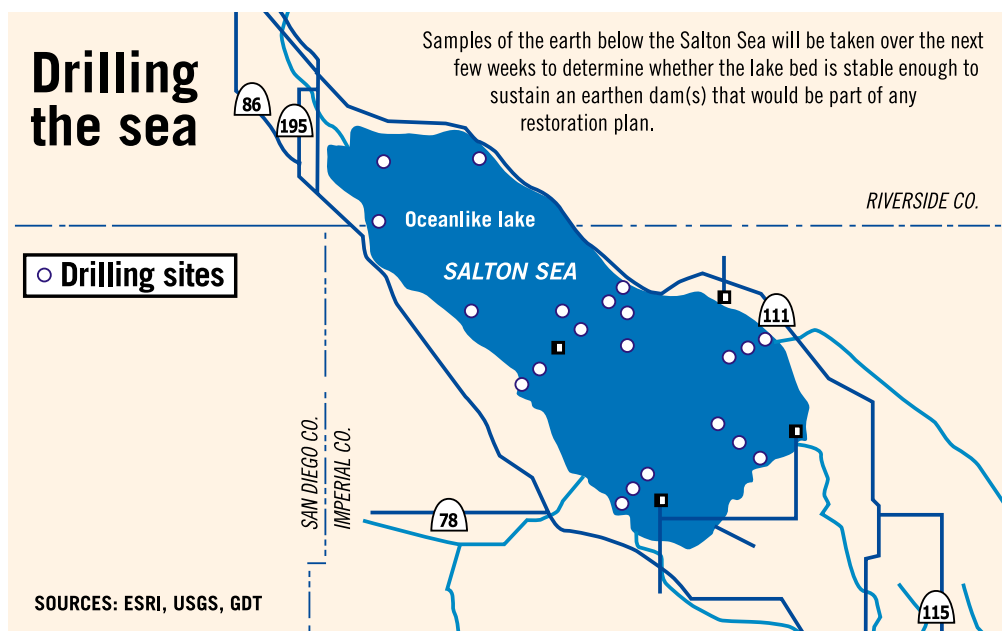
The Salton Sea Authority is managing the geotechnical study with partial funding provided by the United States Bureau of Reclamation. Results are expected later this year.



Gregg Drilling barge will research sediment deposits up to 200 feet below the Salton Sea bed to determine feasibility of using dikes to create a smaller, more viable Salton Lake.



Salton Sea Authority Vice President, Gary Wyatt, addresses the press at the launching of the sea bottom core sampling vessel at Johnson's Landing.



Drilling sites have been selected around the Salton Sea to gather information on all proposed restoration plans.